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Appleby Archaeology Group

The annual General Meeting of the Appleby Archaeology Group took place on 11th of January and was followed by a Member's Evening when four members made presentations.

The first speaker, Harry Hawkins spoke on Dating Fields and Walls.

He reminded the group of the prominence of stone walls in Cumbria and said that the majority are less than two hundred years old and were built when the land was enclosed. Enclosure walls are easily recognised from their long straight lines and rectangular nature. Walls that do not conform to this pattern pose the questions of why they are there and when were they built?

He said it is not possible to date a wall by just looking at it and showed a series of slides to illustrate the different types of wall seen locally and the features which give clues to their dates.

Clues include the shape of the field, for example strip fields suggest that a wall is post medieval. The location and function provide clues, for example the walls around deer parks such as those at Crosby Ravensworth which are dated to the 14th century.

The importance of looking at documents such as the enclosure awards, and estate maps was stressed. They may pin-point the date of a wall.

In conclusion Mr Hawkins mentioned a study done in Derbyshire which identified 5 types of wall covering a period from prehistory to the 18th century.

The second speaker was Alice Palmer who talked about
The Lakeland Gunpowder Industry

Miss Palmer said that the gunpowder industry in Lakeland, became established in the 18th century. The first works opened in 1764. The gun powder produced was used for military, industrial and sporting practices. The manufacture of gunpowder depended on the availability of coppiced woodland and water power and both were available in the valleys of South Westmorland. The Leven and Kent estuaries were accessible for shipping.

Miss Palmer then spoke of her research on the works at Low Wood which opened in 1789. She included biographical details of the people involved. Most of the gunpowder produced at Low Wood in the early years was exported to the slave trade.

The slave trade involved the export of guns and gunpowder to West Africa, the capture and then transfer of slaves to the West Indies in exchange for luxury goods such as sugar which

were brought to Britain. In 1807 Britain abolished the slave trade.

The gunpowder industry survived, and with increasing industrialisation demand grew. Low Woods prospered in the 19th century supplying a number of local industries, game keepers and the military. In 1882 it was taken over. After the first world war demand declined and the last mill closed in 1937.

Barry McKay then presented a paper on The Evidence for Literacy in Cumbria from the 16th to the early 19th Century

The generally accepted view is that until the provision of compulsory education in the second half of the 19th century few people could read. The evidence for this is based on whether the marriage register was signed or marked. Mr McKay doubted whether this was an accurate guide.

To support this argument he suggested that the large number of schools in Cumbria in the 18th century indicated that a significant number of people received some education and he mentioned that Wordsworth had written that in Cumberland and Westmorland "almost every person can read".

He made the point that books were available and described the sources which in the 18th century included circulating libraries, self financing book clubs, subscription libraries and book retailers. Books could be bought in some towns

before 1700, but by the 19th century more than fifteen towns had a book retailer. Appleby's earliest bookseller has the dubious claim of being the first recorded in the area as to having had books stolen.

Chap books were popular books containing songs and fanciful tales. The fact that 500 titles were produced mainly in Penrith, between the 1760's and 1820 again points to widespread literacy.

Finally Mr McKay mentioned the wills and inventories of the Carlise Diocese which give an indication of book ownership before 1800. The majority of books were owned by clergymen, lawyers and gentlemen, but tailors, blacksmiths and masons were also shown as book owners.

The evening concluded with a talk from Georgina Plowright on The Clayton Connection.

Miss Plowright spoke of the links between John Clayton (1792-1890) a prominent citizen and lawyer in Newcastle, who at the age of fifty became a keen amateur archaeologist and Mrs Bridget Atkinson of Temple Sowerby, an eighteenth century matriarch, collector and a founder member of the society of Antiquaries of Newcastle.

The first connection is through marriage. John Clayton's mother Dorothy, was the daughter of Bridget and George Atkinson. Bridget was the only surviving grandparent to

Dorothy's children so it is not surprising that a bond was formed between the two households.

Some of the correspondence between the Claytons and Atkinsons survives. It confirms the close links and gives a detailed insight into the lives of the two families.

The second connection is collecting. In 1840 John Clayton began archaeological excavations at the Roman fort at Chesters which was on his father's estate. These continued for nearly fifty years. He excavated the curtain of Hadrian's Wall, its milecastles, turrets and four of the forts and by the end of his life he had amassed a substantial and academically important collection of Roman artefacts which are now on view at Chesters Museum.

Bridget is known for her shell collection, and on her death around 1818 her personal possessions went to her youngest unmarried daughter, Jane Atkinson, who in turn left her possessions to Sarah Anne Clayton, sister of John. The presence of a substantial number of shells in the Clayton Collection suggests that they were the remains of Bridget's collection.

Miss Plowright concluded by mentioning a further connection. Some Romano-British artefacts found at Kirby Thore in 1832 were distributed to Jane Atkinson and they later found their way into the Clayton Collection.